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Title:

ALP Broadcast by the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Don Dunstan, QC, MP.

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A.L.P. BROADCAST BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, HON. DON DUNSTAN,
Q.C., M.P.
5-K.A., 6.55 P.M. 29/1/69.

GOOD EVENING :

THE STATE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED IN THE BUDGET THAT THEY PROPOSED TO IMPOSE CHARGES FOR MENTAL HOSPITAL PATIENTS AND THEY HAVE NOW INTRODUCED TO THE PARLIAMENT A BILL TO PROVIDE THAT THEY MAY MAKE CHARGES IN MENTAL HOSPITALS AND THAT THEY MAY RECOVER THESE CHARGES FROM PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE PATIENTS. THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT MENTAL HOSPITAL CASES ARE TO BE CHARGED MONEY FOR THEIR TREATMENT HAS CAUSED WIDESPREAD ALARM AND DISMAY AMONGST SOCIAL WORKERS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA AND PARTICULARLY AMONGST PSYCHIATRISTS AND PEOPLE ENGAGED IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES SINCE THE WHOLE PROJECT RUNS COUNTER TO THE KIND OF EXPANSION OF ADEQUATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WHICH TOOK PLACE UNDER THE LABOR GOVERNMENT AND WHICH WAS ONE OF ITS PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS.

I WANT TO SUMMARISE FOR YOU THE OBVIOUS OBJECTIONS TO CHARGES IN MENTAL HOSPITAL CASES AS SUMMARISED FOR ME BY THE

CHAIRMAN OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH. HE, LIKE I, HAS HAD MANY APPROACHES FROM PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THE TREATMENT OF THE MENTALLY ILL WHO ARE ALARMED AT THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL. MENTAL ILLNESS OFTEN RUNS A LONG AND CHRONIC COURSE. EVEN WITH VERY CONSIDERABLE HELP IT IS OFTEN FINANCIALLY CRIPPLING TO AN INDIVIDUAL. THE PROPOSED CHARGES DISCRIMINATE IN FAVOUR OF THE PRIVATE PRACTITIONER AND AGAINST STATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. A PATIENT IN A MEDICAL INSURANCE FUND CAN RECEIVE A REFUND FOR THE COST OF A PRIVATE PSYCHIATRIC CONSULTATION OR TREATMENT IN A PRIVATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL, BUT NOT FOR A CONSULTATION FEE OR HOSPITAL TREATMENT CHARGED FOR BY THE STATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. IT IS THE STATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES WHICH HAVE DELIBERATELY EXPANDED TO INTRODUCE PREVENTIVE PSYCHIATRY - TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO SEEK HELP WITHOUT CHARGE EARLY IN THE COURSE OF THEIR ILLNESS.

AGAIN AND AGAIN IT HAS BEEN STRESSED IN MENTAL HEALTH WEEKS WHICH WE HAVE HAD IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA THAT EARLY TREATMENT CAN SHORTEN THE COURSE OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND FAVORABLY AFFECT THE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME OF THE TREATMENT. ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CHARGES IS THE FACT THAT WHEREAS NEUROSES - THE Milder FORMS OF MENTAL ILLNESS - ARE FOUND MORE OFTEN IN PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE AND UPPER INCOME GROUPS, PSYCHOSES - THE MORE SEVERE FORMS OF MENTAL ILLNESS - ARE FOUND MUCH MORE OFTEN IN PEOPLE IN THE LOWER INCOME GROUPS. AS A RESULT, PRIVATE PSYCHIATRISTS HAVE TENDED TO BECOME EXPERT IN TREATING NEUROSES BUT THE THERAPIES FOR PSYCHOSIS HAVE BEEN LARGELY LEFT TO STATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. ON BALANCE THEN, THE PEOPLE WHO MOST OFTEN SUFFER FROM THE MORE SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESSES AND WHO ARE LEAST ABLE TO PAY WILL IN MOST CASES NEED TO RECEIVE TREATMENT BUT NOW THEY WILL HAVE TO PAY AND NOT GET ANY REFUND, EVEN IF THEY BELONG TO A MEDICAL INSURANCE SCHEME.

IT IS NOT CLEAR FROM THE BILL WHICH HAS BEEN PUT BEFORE THE HOUSE BY THE GOVERNMENT WHETHER CERTIFIED PATIENTS ARE TO BE CHARGED, BUT CERTAINLY THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSES TO PROVIDE THAT IT COULD MAKE REGULATIONS TO IMPOSE CHARGES ON THEM. NOW THIS IS EXTRAORDINARILY HARSH. WE COMPEL CERTIFIED PATIENTS TO HAVE TREATMENT. FOR THE MOST PART WE ~~MAKE~~ ^{HOLD} THEM IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY OFTEN AGAINST THEIR WILL. HAVING COMPELLED THEM TO GO INTO A MENTAL INSTITUTION ARE WE THEN TO SAY " WE ARE GOING TO CHARGE YOU FOR WHAT YOU DIDN'T ASK FOR BUT WE TELL YOU YOU MUST HAVE"?

IT DOES APPEAR FROM THE BILL THAT IT IS PROPOSED THAT THERE BE A MEANS TEST, BUT AS IS SO OFTEN THE CASE, A MEANS TEST PROTECTS THE SPENDTHRIFT AND PENALISES THE THRIFTY AND MENTAL HEALTH OFTEN RUNS A LONG COURSE THAT IS ENTIRELY IN A DIFFERENT CLASS FROM THE AVERAGE STAY OF PATIENTS IN A GENERAL HOSPITAL.

A MEANS TEST THEN COULD BE A MEANS OF TAKING FROM THE THRIFTY EVERYTHING WHICH THEY HAD SAVED AND WHAT EFFECT IS THIS GOING TO HAVE UPON THE COURSE OF THEIR MENTAL ILLNESS? WHAT IS MORE IF A PATIENT IN A STATE PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL IS A BREADWINNER, NO COMMONWEALTH SOCIAL SERVICE BENEFIT IS PAYABLE TO HIS FAMILY UNLESS HIS WIFE CONSENTS TO BEING TECHNICALLY REGARDED AS A WIDOW AND IF THE FAMILY DOES RECEIVE A COMMONWEALTH SOCIAL SERVICE PENSION, IT IS CERTAINLY NOT CALCULATED TO COVER THE COST OF A LONG MENTAL ILLNESS.

IN ALL THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, ONE CAN ONLY CONCLUDE THAT THE PROPOSAL TO MAKE CHARGES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IS ONE WHICH WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT TO A VERY GRAVE DEGREE THE TREATMENT OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

GOOD NIGHT.

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GOOD NIGHT.